DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 058 775 FL 002 831

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TITLE The Migrant Child and His Psycho-linguistic Problems.
INSTITUTION Australian Association for the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language, Clayton.
PUB DATE Oct 71
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at a conference on "The Migrant Child and the school," August 30, 1971, Melbourne, Australia
JOURNAL CIT AATEFL Newsletter; v1 n2 p17-30 Oct 1971

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Acculturation; Applied Linguistics; Attitudes; Biculturalism; Bilingual Education; Contrastive Linguistics; Cultural Awareness; Cultural Differences; *Cultural Education; Cultural Pluralism; *Curriculum Development; English (Second Language); Immigrants; *Language Programs; *Migrant Children; Migrant Education; Psycholinguistics; *Second Language Learning; Teacher Aides; Teacher Education
IDENTIFIERS *Australia

ABSTRACT

Present attempts to integrate migrants linguistically and culturally into Australian society need to be improved. The migrant child must be taught to learn how to learn, and learning experiences must be structured to promote education in school subjects and communication with peers. There is a problem of acculturation; migrant children must be taught to develop a differentiation mechanism to bridge two cultural systems and two language systems. There must be a systematic growth of cultural awareness, and the Australian community must also recognize and accept foreign cultures. The new concept of the pluralistic society should be adopted. Language-learning and teaching-research centers should be established to specialize in the study of problems in second language learning; applied linguistics; evaluation and development of curriculum, tests, and teaching materials; and information coordination and dissemination. (VM)

ED 058775

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From: AATEFL Newsletter. Vol. 1, Number 2, October 1971.

The following paper was presented at the consultation by Dr E.W. Bauer, Director of Language Services, Monash University.

The Migrant Child and his Psycho-linguistic Problems

Foreign language learning is as much an individual psychological process as it is determined by the social and linguistic system of the migrant child's host culture. Second Language Acquisition represents the most complex form of behaviour modification which we know. It deals with thinking, feeling and doing (verbal expression) in social communication.
It occurs simultaneously in three different domains:

1. In cognition (the Cognitive Domain);
2. in motivation, interest and attitude (the Affective Domain);
3. in the actual mechanics of language production (the Psycho-motor Domain).

It is on this basis that I propose to deal with the linguistic problem of the migrant child as far as it is possible within the constraints of this paper.

I. The Problem

a. The problem of the migrant is one of learning a foreign language in what he faces as a largely monolingual community.

Everybody knows that learning a foreign language is not easy and we have evidence of many brilliant children who never achieve high standards in foreign languages. It is also common knowledge that even though a person might have learned say, French at school, he cannot do much with it

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in France. Even if a person happens to take a vacation in the foreign country for several weeks or months, his mastery of the foreign language does not just come about by itself in a short time. He has to spend considerable time and effort, usually years, before he feels at relative ease with the language.

This is also the situation with most migrants who come to Australia. There is one great difference however: Migrants, in addition, are <u>subjected to pressures to which the usual learner of a foreign language is not exposed</u>. They have to make a living with the help of the foreign language. Performance of the children at school is completely dependent on the mastery of the foreign language in each and every school subject. Migrant children are not regarded as casually as tourists by their peers in the community, but as competitors at work and in the classroom. They are often regarded as under-achievers who hinder the smooth running of the school day and hold up others in their learning. Thus, in contrast to other foreign language learners, migrant children are expected to acquire the new language under the most adverse conditions: they are taught by subject-teachers who have no idea of the problems these children are facing; they are taught together with children who are native speakers.

Although the migrant child faces many difficulties, he has a strong desire to belong to the peer group and so his motivation to learn English is high as long as his progress is being recognised and rewarded by a positive attitude of his peers, teachers and parents. Otherwise the migrant child loses his original motivation and remains culturally and linguistically deprived. He cannot hold out long enough by himself alone.

b. Foreign language learning involves the learning of four different groups of language skills: understanding of oral speech in communication, in reporting or in cued situations demanding action, speaking the foreign language, reading the most diverse materials in the foreign language, and writing intelligibly about them.

These four skills are needed for every area of the language. The migrant child a) has to perform in every school subject in all four skills and b) he needs to communicate with his peers and English-speaking adults. There are basic patterns of grammar which underlie the system of the English language, to be sure, but there are in addition the cultural idiosyncracies of Australians, the social behaviour patterns of the community, which differ already from the English and the American way of speaking and writing English, and there is the need to learn repertoires in English which are connected with the different school subjects. The child has to understand the subject matter and to express himself competently in it, i.e. with an acceptable degree of appropriate, meaningful and intelligible speech patterns and stylistic form. Therefore, to teach migrant children only the basics of English grammar and a certain amount of situational English as it is represented in current course programmes does not give them the tools to tackle their school work and to effectively communicate with their peers and teachers, - it is a beginning, but it is not quite enough. Modern foreign language programmes are using a contrastive-linguistic approach for analysing and practising language patterns. Differences between native and target language in the sound system, in morphology and in syntax are lifted out from the total corpus of the new language and are being especially practised. This approach is mainly usable where homogeneous groups of migrants are being taught English. Material based on contrastive analysis exists

for only a few languages, and is limited by and large to problems in phonology and morphology. Therefore, we cannot limit performance in English to these instances. Let us not forget that the migrant child is often judged in his performance according to the same criteria which are applied to English-speaking students. He usually is expected to understand, read, speak and write at the same speed as the others.

c. To sum up the problems we can say the performance of the foreign language learner, i.e. the migrant child, rests on three factors:

1. The attitudes, motivation and understanding of the language learner himself and of his surroundings, i.e. his peers, teachers, and the community at large determine his '<u>confidence in learning</u>'. He might be willing to learn, but if so, he does not know how. And his teachers, his peers and the community have little or no understanding of how to help him. Frequently, they are not sufficiently interested to assist him to master the language and, especially in the case of his peers, to do schoolwork together with him and associate with him. Often the migrant child is exposed to a frustrating situation of 'the blind leading the blind'.

2. He has to master the grammar and understand the meaning of the language in what he hears, what is explained to him, or what he reads, so that he can say, he is '<u>getting it</u>'. It is here that we think of Carroll's 'phonetic memory ability' in its aspect of recognizing and remembering particular speech sounds or combinations of such in <u>Gestalten</u>. Within his communicative competence the student has to develop grammatical sensitivity, i.e. the ability to recognize grammatical functions of words and syntactic patterns. In the course of learning a foreign language the child is also required to develop inductive language learning ability. Individual differences are great indeed. However,

they can be measured and predicted with a fair degree of reliability. In order to prevent wasteful teaching and planning operations measuring instruments should be used to predict learning rates and improve placement policies.

3. The migrant child has to master the mechanics of the language, i.e. the reading, speaking, understanding and writing skills of the language with the same speed as the English-speaking peers ('doing it'). It is especially in this domain where quantification and rate of learning in English will differ mostly. Achievement levels will influence grouping, sequencing and curriculum planning. Sectioning students by ability and providing programmed material for skill-oriented activities will prevent slowing down of classes and will make learning much more successful and more pleasant for the migrant child and his teachers. This is very rarely done. Commonwealth and State authorities do not have adequate and appropriate placement tests available for the teacher and the administration.

II. Overcoming the Problem

It seems that the whole approach towards linguistic integration of the foreign child in the community must be reappraised. One can easily speak about integration and yet practise segregration in approaches and strategies. We hear and read about a pluralistic society, bilingual and bicultural education - and many schools actually introduce 'withdrawal' classes and special English classes at the cost of depriving the migrant child of other required learning sessions. What can be done?

1. The first goal must be to help the migrant child to 'learn how to learn' and to build up his confidence through a well-structured and learner-oriented teaching system with opportunities for self-evaluation in informal and formal tests.

2. To this effect one should structure the children's learning experiences so that they sufficiently deal with their two main immediate and urgent concerns; education in the subjects and communication with their peers. This means that we should introduce special training in 'school-appropriate behaviours' and their verbal and non-verbal repertoires. These repertoires have to be measured in order to help the migrant child to achieve an appropriate degree of future school performance. Too little is done in this respect and it is wrongly assumed that commonly used English language textbooks can enable the migrant child of, say, five or eight years to acquire all needed verbal behaviours which his Australian or English peers have already established at pre-school age.

Special materials and programmes have to be developed on the basis of clearly established communication goals with special attention given to the understanding problems of the listeners. These goals then have to be spelled out in curricula and in realistically assessed time spans in lower-stream syllabi.

III. The Present Position

Special English Programmes in the schools in most cases suffer from the following weaknesses:

There is a stigma attached to being assigned to 'withdrawal classes', e.g. eleven periods per week in a number of high schools in Victoria. Students are worried about being classified as failures. They frequently miss other important lessons and they would prefer to study

Special English out of school to prevent this. It is a problem both for the students and for the teachers. Not only do the students find difficulty in understanding the present lesson, but they must do, on their own, work others have had help with. The teacher is not only asked to assist the students in the interpretation of the present lesson, but he must explain work that the student has missed through being in Special English. How often have we read on a report 'Impossible to assess. Attends Special English'? And when one looks at the Special English teacher's report, one is quite likely to find 'never attends Special English classes'. Thus the teacher is overtaxed and the lesson often ends without the needs of his 'Special English students' being satisfied.

Children belonging to some ethnic groups have to tackle almost insurmountable problems of acculturation. This is especially noticeable with Italian, Greek, Yugoslav and Turkish children. Not only is there insufficient provision made for outlines and special guidelines for linguistic and cultural recognition training and - in areas of concentration of specific immigrant groups - for a concept of bilingual and bicultural education. There is also no assistance given to the children in developing a differentiation mechanism which is essential in order to bridge two cultural systems and two language systems. In language learning many of the linguistic problems stem from psychological difficulties in understanding and applying differences in cultural concepts, habits and values and their appropriate verbal expression. There is an inbuilt resistance present in every learner of a foreign language at the elementary level to find the appropriate expressions and associations

in the second language. Consequently, not only sound patterns of the native language system are transferred into the new language, but also ways of thinking, of concept formation, and of expression. Therefore, a poorly-trained foreign language teacher who is not aware of these psycholinguistic difficulties and only concentrates on the mechanistic aspects of language drill and grammatical exercises will not have any success in teaching these language skills because he emphasizes the psychomotor activities only. He neglects to consider the much needed balance in the affective and in the cognitive domains. Perception and the formation of attitudes and motivation towards the foreign language culture cannot be effected through dry and boring grammatical exercises. We nowadays speak of communicative competence and communication ability as the most desirable goals in foreign language learning. We cannot assume that these goals should be approached only at the intermediate or advanced stages of language learning. The teaching programme has to devote a substantial portion to the systematic growth of cultural awareness in communication tasks and we have to build this into the social studies programmes.

In the school situation, the help of the migrant child's peers and of teacher-aides from the community should be recruited to help him to become part of the new culture. This approach would not only help the migrant child, but would, in addition, make the native Australian child aware of the background of his foreign classmates and their families, and of their specific difficulties. We know about the resentment of many Australian parents and children against the 'intruders'.

Yet, it is unrealistic to put the complete burden of integration on the shoulders of the migrant. The future of the Australian community in South-East Asia stands and falls with the recognition and acceptance of foreign cultures. The whole task of foreign language teaching in this country will be realized only if a new concept of the pluralistic society can be adopted. This society should actively incorporate not only bilingual and multilingual approaches, but also bicultural and multicultural awareness in its value system. The community should be committed to this concept and not pay lip service only.

At the last Australian Citizenship Convention it was pointed out that serious attention should be given to measures in helping the migrant to overcome the cultural shock. This meant especially measures to provide better curricula in the education system for all levels and the introduction of more teaching about cultures and sociology. It was suggested that special grants might be made available to libraries to start up areas dealing with the cultures of various migrant people. Research into problems arising from conflicting cultural patterns has been suggested and a thorough appraisal of the educational needs of migrants should be undertaken, especially migrants in their early teens, who arrive here and do not have enough time to sufficiently learn English before getting a job. Courses in foreign languages should be established in high schools for new Asian languages and also for Polish, Italian and Russian. In this way the study of foreign languages would be enhanced in the eyes of ethnic groups and the most serious points of critique could be met.

IV. Some Suggestions for Improvement

Present attempts to overcome the linguistic problems would be greatly assisted by the following:

1. Effective co-ordination and central planning both on the Commonwealth and the State levels in
   a) Research
   b) Teacher training in TEFL for all types of persons involved (specialist 'core teachers', teacher-aides, social workers, guidance counsellors, social studies and other subject matter teachers and especially primary school teachers).
   c) Development and/or adaption of adequate measuring instruments, such as diagnostic tests in all language skills for placement (including aptitude tests), achievement tests and proficiency tests.
   d) Organization of teaching programmes for the pre-school, primary and secondary levels which are based on professional assessment and specification of short and long-range objectives and on grading and sequencing procedures.

2. Widespread and readily available guidance in the use of technological aids for the teaching of English and assistance in the development and distribution of teaching equipment and media for the schools. The best language laboratory is useless if no appropriate and adequate 'software' is prepared and the best teaching media are useless if the teachers are not trained in their use.

It would clearly go beyond the scope of this paper to make detailed suggestions about the many steps one could take to improve the rather desperate situation

Let me mention just one. It seems to me that there is a need to set up one or several research centres for language learning and teaching which specialize in the study of problems in

- Second language learning
- Applied Linguistics, with special reference to contrastive language and culture studies
- Evaluation and development of teaching materials
- Evaluation and development of tests
- Information and co-ordination, including the establishment of a Materials Centre and Clearing House to receive and disseminate information of special expertise, activities and research in the field of language learning
- Curriculum development and the teaching of special experimental programmes to provide a framework for observation techniques and evaluation studies for teacher trainees.

If one really wants to overcome the problems, some of which I mentioned here, a serious effort needs to be made to upgrade the professional standards of the TEFL teachers and of any other full or part-time personnel helping within and outside of the school, e.g.

a) by provision of incentives for further study

b) by provision of short training courses.

Some of the criticisms of and suggestions for improving present English programmes are the following:

1. They are insufficient and too short. Present attempts do not provide a blueprint for several alternative approaches, since obviously not one single solution can be found. Such approaches include a) bilingual programmes for all subjects; b) bilingual programmes for some educational subjects; c) special English programmes

for certain periods, but not concurrent with other required subjects; d) integrated teaching with specially-trained TEFL teachers also on the primary level; e) introductory and/or remedial crash programmes.

The normal school budget does not permit allocation of funds for remedial tutoring on weekends or evenings with community programmes for specific language groups within or outside school. We should include such within the schoolday (organized by school authorities with the help of the teachers) or over and above the schoolday (organized by private groups or individuals in the community). All available help of private groups, churches, migrant groups, neighbourhood councils, and by peers in study groups should be organized by 'Action Groups' such as has started in New South Wales.

Linguistically speaking one may provide activities which promote a) the development of two languages in the child, b) unstructured audio-lingual-visual exposure to the English language, and c) structured audio-lingual-visual exposure to English.

2. Many teachers of EFL are not qualified and some teaching materials are inadequate.

3. Children who would have been classed as quite bright in their own country found instruction in English hard to understand. They leave school not having been able to understand much of what had been going on there in two or three years.

4. Some Australian-born children of migrant parents cannot speak English when they are enrolled at the age of five.

5. The lack of sufficient federal and state support for the establishment of adequate training and research facilities

for TEFL in tertiary institutions is continuing to lame the development and upgrading process of a professional teacher potential in this country. Very few certified and diplomated TEFL teachers are available, very few are being trained and many enthusiastic teachers cannot cope with the tasks they are expected to perform.

6. Almost no money is made available to support team-work in materials development, and curriculum design by specialists in the field. Consequently one or two programmes developed for a specific level of teaching and a specific age group continue to be used for all levels. Insufficient make-shift solutions are provided with little success. A national committee set up to study and to improve the situation does not draw on all available resources and expertise in the field.

7. Assessment and evaluation procedures of teaching programmes, teacher training, curriculum development and of methodology are neither conducted professionally nor co-ordinated. Because of this teaching efforts and the taxpayer's money is dissipated and wasted. The measuring instruments used to assess achievement and progress are antiquated, outdated and inappropriate. Placement and course organization are thus seriously hampered, if not made impossible in many instances.

Much has been done in migrant education in this country by the citizens, and the authorities on the Commonwealth and State levels, the Churches and Community groups, and by thousands of enthusiastic teachers. The problems and weaknesses pointed out in this paper have largely been caused through the sudden influx of many migrant children. Much has already been achieved for those who are among tomorrow's new citizens of this beautiful country. This I can

appreciate as an immigrant and as the father of two Australian-born sons. Looking at the present attempts made to integrate migrants linguistically and culturally from a professional point of view, I must say, we can do better, much better indeed.